

## ***A Door Stands Open Into Heaven....***



Last week Karen was encouraging us to think outside the box – or at least outside the sheep pen.... This week Stephen tells us of a Door open into heaven. Easter speaks to us of open doors. Of courage and possibility.

Even in a world that seems so full of challenge, and impossibility – personally, socially, internationally and environmentally... we are people that can speak of Hope, and not just optimistic hope, but Hope founded on our experience of the Power of Jesus that opens doors of heaven into places of darkness, violence and despair.

Our eco group at S. Margaret's was speaking to the children from the school the other day, about how the problem of climate change can seem so huge and irreversible, and at such a high level, that it is hard to see possibility for change, to see the part we can play; it is hard to see hope. And yet, as we spoke together, we realised the importance of all the small things we can do, and how they add up – and how being people who speak and stand for hope and possibility in the world is so needed, and does make a difference. I believe this is true. I also believe it is true when we look at the broken situation of our human context too – the violence and pain, the economic strain, the wars, the abuse, and the difficulty to trust those in power.

That hope, as I said to them at the time, is the Easter Gift – it's the hope that despite all the evidence, despite all the odds, ordinary people, praying, formed by the Light of Easter, doing small and ordinary things in God's grace, can change the world. People who can stand firm in the faith, can think outside the box, and expand horizons – our faith gives us firmer roots, and wider horizons, than human possibility.

And in the Hope we speak, we are called to take our stand. To stand amongst the mess, and the shards, and the broken dreams, and speak of open doors to life, healing, and transformation. And not just speak, but find the 'Word becoming flesh'. Our prayers and speech forming our actions, and enabling others' actions – insisting on the possibility for love and transformation in a world worn down by despair.

In our reading from Acts today, we have the echoes of broken dreams – the coats being laid at the feet of Saul as Stephen is murdered remind of Palm Sunday. We might weep in heart about how one moment we can glimpse a bigger picture in delight of praise, and throw our cloaks at the feet of the Lord, and the next we are caught up in the crowd identity – caught into another narrative, laying the responsibility at the feet of someone else. It might seem inevitable that every good doesn't last, every hope turns to violence and despair. And taking our own responsibility is pointless when those in power are violent of heart.

But in this reading, too, we also have the open door... Easter breaking through. We recognise that this word of violence is not the final word. Saul, at whose feet the coats are laid .... well, he does of course become Paul – transforming from persecutor to apostle. The world might seem immovable, closed to Grace ... but there is, in God, always the hope, always the possibility – always the *reality* of healing.

And so, as we now stand in the light of Easter for FIFTY days, let it soak in, and form us, re-rooting us in the truth of light and love and hope and healing. Let us pray, and breathe, and let Easter become our truth.

Did you notice Stephen made the same prayers at his death that Jesus did? – asking God's forgiveness, and commending himself into God's Spirit. He shows us the way. Inspiring us, too, to be God's prayer, to let Jesus pray in us.

*A door stands open into heaven,*

and calls us to stand in the light, to pray in the light... and then to act in the light. Even if all that acting is, is to be true to who God calls us to be. And to trust that is enough.

Prayer takes us from our questions, and from the doubts of *our mind*...to what we know with *our hearts*. In prayer, we stand with Jesus in that open door, connecting us directly to his power, where heaven pours down life into the world.

S. Catherine of Siena reminds us:

*be who you are meant to be, and you will set the world on fire.*

Jesus assures us in our Gospel today:

*If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.*

Perhaps faced with the world as it is, this promise doesn't seem simple, and we don't understand it. We might have so many doubts and questions.

I love Thomas in this reading – (I love Thomas anyway) –

*Lord, he says, we don't understand, we can't see what you can see...*

*.....how can we know the way?!*

There is so much that doesn't make sense. So much that is too big for us to understand. So do not be afraid to cry out and to question. To ask God for his help, and his presence, and his guidance.

Jesus answers Thomas with love – oh Thomas, he says, I will be with you. Do not worry about knowing and understanding every step of the journey, just take my hand and we will walk on together. For Jesus is not just the destination we reach for, but the Way there. Trust me, he says, the Door is open ahead of us. Walk in my footsteps.

Stephen reminds us today, to be unafraid. Everything we do, we do ***in Jesus***... and everything we do in Jesus, we are equipped for. Luke tells us Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit... and as Karen reminded us last week, we are now in time to start getting excited about Pentecost! About

being equipped anew... blessed by all we need, given the courage, the possibility, the God-within...

*where I am, says the Lord, you shall be also.*

Be who you are meant to be, and you will set the world on fire – *full of the fire of the Spirit of the Lord*. Take courage, stand firm, don't be afraid to think outside the box. For in God, all things are possible.

For the Easter Gift tells us that we can have Hope.

Hope.

Pray.

Even in the darkest of places. For despite all the odds, ordinary people, praying, formed by the Light of Easter, doing small and ordinary things in God's grace, can be a channel of Grace and Hope that will change the world.

For a Door stands open into heaven.

Amen